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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: PM ANSIP's VISIT TO GEORGIA

11. (U) Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip visited Georgia February 4-6 (his first trip as Prime Minister). Following the visit, Kyllike Sillaste Elling, the PM's Foreign Policy Advisor, briefed interested journalists and diplomats on highlights of the trip.

-- PM Ansip met with President Saakashvili, Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze, Prime Minister Lado Gurgenidze, and Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili. The PM was accompanied by a 22-person Estonian business delegation.

-- In his meetings, PM Ansip noted that events in November had cost Georgia a large part of its credibility. GOG officials acknowledged mistakes and expressed a desire to learn from them. The GOG also recognized the need to open and support a productive dialogue with members of the Georgian opposition in order to develop a positive program to move Georgia forward.

-- PM Ansip expressed strong support for Georgia's NATO aspirations, including a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia at the Bucharest Summit. At the same time, PM Ansip made clear NATO accession is a multi-tiered process and will not happen quickly.

-- PM Ansip stressed that moving closer to the EU will take time. GOG officials asked for GOE assistance formalizing a visa facilitation process with the EU, noting they believe the current system is discriminatory towards Georgian citizens (in favor of Russians).

-- GOG officials also expressed concern that recognition of Kosovo would be used as a precedent. They pointed out that frozen conflicts (e.g. Abkhazia, South Ossetia) are each unique and should be treated separately. (NOTE: On March 7, the Spokesperson for the MFA reiterated to local press that Estonia does not believe Kosovo should be compared to frozen conflicts in the former Soviet Union and the GOG does not plan to recognize Abkhazia, South Ossetia or other conflict areas. End Note.)

-- PM Ansip and his delegation also had meetings with Georgian businesspeople where they drew attention to the need for Georgia to orient its economy towards markets outside of Russia. (Note: According to Estonian statistics, during 2007, Estonians invested approximately USD 7 million in the Georgian food industry, primarily in nuts and wine. End Note.)

12. (U) During his visit, PM Ansip committed to sending a media advisor to Georgia. On March 13, Ainar Ruusaar, the former head of Estonian TV (currently with the Baltic News Service) and Allar Joks, the former

Chancellor of Justice, will go to Georgia to share Estonia's media reform experience with Georgian state-owned TV executives.

13. (SBU) Although PM Ansip did not meet directly with representatives of the opposition during his visit, on March 10-11, Georgian opposition leaders (Levan Gatsetsiladze, Salome Zurabisvili, David Usupasvili and Kakha Kukava) traveled to Tallinn. They met with PM Ansip, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, members of Parliament, journalists and others. Simmu Tiik, Estonian MFA Director of the Third Political Department, told us that the GOE views the visit by Georgian opposition leaders as an opportunity for Estonia to illustrate what is expected of an opposition group in the European political arena. The GOE wants the Georgian opposition leadership to understand the rules and methods of productive political engagement, and how opposition groups can become a network of checks and balances for a sitting administration.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: The GOE remains committed to promoting democracy at EUR's frontiers of freedom. Prime Minister Ansip's visit represents ongoing GOE's efforts to promote reform in Georgia and to support Georgian efforts toward NATO and EU Membership. In addition to high-level political support, Georgia is a priority recipient of Estonian development assistance. In 2007, Estonia's official development assistance to Georgia more than doubled (from about USD 456,000 to USD 1.04 million.) End Comment.

PHILLIPS